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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MINSK WEEKLY REPORT - April 7, 2006

11. The following are brief items of interest compiled by
Embassy Minsk.

Post Elections

12. Milinkevich's European Tour

Opposition leader and former presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich traveled to Vienna (April 3 and 4) and Strasbourg (April 5 and 6) to meet with top EU officials. In Vienna, Milinkevich met with Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel, the head of the Austrian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly (PA) of the Council of Europe Michael Spindelegger, PA speaker Andreas Khol, and ambassadors from the European Union and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The EU officials offered their support for Belarusians persecuted and jailed for political reasons. Schuessel opined that the EU should provide financial support for political groups and independent media in Belarus and impose sanctions on Lukashenko. European Parliament (EP) president Josep Borel invited Milinkevich to Strasbourg to watch the EP's debate about the situation in Belarus following the presidential elections, to discuss short- and long-term cooperation plans with EU countries, to meet with MEP's and to hold a press conference with EP Vice-President Janusz Onyszkiewicz. Milinkevich is scheduled to travel to Berlin on April 7 and to meet with EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg on April 10.

13. Supreme Court Rejects Election Results Complaint

On April 5, the Supreme Court rejected an appeal from former presidential candidates Aleksandr Kozulin and Milinkevich requesting the court to invalidate the March 19 presidential elections results. The court claimed that the appeal was outside the court's jurisdiction. Milinkevich's team experienced difficulties when it tried to submit the claim to the Supreme Court on March 31; the court refused to accept the complaint due to a missing notarized document. Milinkevich's representative had to send the complaint via certified mail. The complaint, which Milinkevich signed in the presence of journalists, was 26 pages long and included a 773 page supplemental report detailing violations of election regulations.

14. USD 70 Fine for Legally Printed Campaign Booklets

On March 31, a Gomel district judge fined Milinkevich's adviser Victor Korneyenko USD 70 for legally printed campaign booklets and ordered the 28,000 copies of the book destroyed. The judge declared that the slogan on the book "Milinkevich is the New President" violated the Electoral Code. Human rights defender Leonid Sudalenko argued, however, that the "judge ignored the fact that the Central Election Commission had approved the design and paid for the publication of the booklets."

Sudalenko claimed that Korneyenko was not involved in the printing of these booklets, only their transportation. Korneyenko plans to appeal the decision.

Human Rights

15. Unconscious Polish Diplomat Dies in Belarusian Hospital

On April 6, Polish vice consul Ryszard Badon-Lehr died after lingering in a coma for more than two weeks in the intensive care unit at Bialystok hospital. The 63-year old vice consul was found unconscious in his apartment after failing to show up for work on March 22. He had electric shock traces around his kidney and bruises on his body. Polish prosecutors have launched an investigation into the suspected beating of diplomat. The Polish Charge, however, told us he excludes GOB involvement in the case.

16. Opposition Activist Fined for Quoting the Bible

On April 6, a Vitebsk judge fined opposition activist Boris Khamaida BYR 5.6 million [USD 2,600] for demonstrating with a sign that contained the Gospel of Matthew quote, "The one who endures to the end will be saved." Police detained Khamaida for three hours on March 20 for displaying the sign and accused him of breaking demonstration laws. Khamaida was also fined USD 2,200 last month for displaying signs that called on people to boycott the presidential elections.

17. Roma Leader Assaulted in Minsk

On April 3, a group of six unidentified men assaulted human rights activist and Roma community leader Nikolai Kalinin in

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downtown Minsk. Kalinin explained that the men beat him up to defend the honor of a woman whom he had allegedly insulted, but Kalinin claimed that he had never seen the woman before. Kalinin's father Valdemar defended his son after the men started their assault. Kalinin linked the attack to his human rights work and his involvement in monitoring the presidential elections. Kalinin and his father will not complain to the police because, "it would make no sense, as they [i.e. the police] could lay the blame on us if we did." According to independent news source Belapan, Kalinin is currently seeking medical treatment for his wounds from his family because he cannot receive medical treatment for the assault wounds without a referral from law enforcement.

18. Severinets' Leave Cut Short Without Explanation

On April 6, prominent politician Pavel Severinets, who is serving a two-year "restricted freedom" sentence, was told he must end his visit with his parents after just one day. Severinets petitioned the GOB for more than 10 weeks for this four-day leave, despite the fact that "restricted freedom" terms allow detainees a couple of days off per month. Shortly after the visit started, Severinets received a phone call from the correctional facility telling him to report back by the following day. Severinets said they did not offer an explanation for their demand, but promised Severinets he would "face problems" if he did not return as instructed. Severinets considered the order to be illegal, but planned to obey it.

19. Orthodox Church Decided Against Screening of Propaganda Films

On April 5, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) decided that the documentaries by Belarusian State Television Radio Company deputy head Yuriy Azaryonok should not be shown at the ROC's Easter festival. Originally a meeting with Azaryonok, who is a notorious state propagandist, and a screening of his politicized documentaries, "The Spiritual War," were on the schedule for the Easter exhibition. However, the ROC decided that the program should be changed after it received a letter

of protest from young believers who opposed showing the films because they might discredit the ROC and its leadership.

¶10. Police Admit Seized Newspapers By Mistake

On April 4 after an exhaustive inspection, police admitted that the 85,600 copies of the independent weekly "Tovarishch," which were seized on March 17, contained no irregularities. The newspapers had been delivered from Moscow and were being unloaded in a garage when police became aware of the shipment two days before the presidential elections and suspected illegal activity. The police seized the truck and the newspapers and sealed the garage. These copies were returned and are being distributed. Tovarishch continued printing editions of the newspaper in the interim following the seizure.

Economy

¶11. More Belarusian Oil for Farmers

On April 4, the GOB obliged Belarusian oil refineries to supply additional gasoline and diesel fuel for the upcoming sowing campaign. The sowing campaign, which will cost BYR 1.5 trillion [USD 700 million], requires 277,000 tons of diesel fuel and 70,000 tons of gasoline. The Belarusian Naftan oil refinery was ordered to supply an additional 2,600 tons of gasoline to farms in April, and the Mozyr refinery must supply 2,700 tons. In addition, each refinery must supply 3,500 tons of diesel fuel. The joint venture Slavneft-Start must supply an additional 4,000 tons of diesel fuel. [Note: Farms already receive fuel at 20 percent below market cost.]

¶12. State-Owned Coal Company Becomes Sole Supplier for GOB

On March 5, the GOB made the state-owned coal company Belarustorg the sole supplier of coal for Belarus. Belarustorg is owned by the Presidential Administration (PA). All state-run authorities can only buy their coal from Belarustorg. In order to meet domestic demand for coal, Belarus must import an additional 230,000 tons of coal in 2006. The GOB plans to continue to increase its coal purchases 62.5 percent to 520,000 tons until 2012 in order to diversify energy imports. Previously a different PA company had the sole right to supply coal.

¶13. Another Private Company Merged with State-owned Company

On April 4, the leading private pasta producing company, Borimak, announced that it would merge with the state-owned bread-making company, Minskoblkhleproduct. Borimak cited its

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poor financial situation as the reason for the merger, which stemmed from low demand for its pasta. According to Prime-Tass, administrative procedures forced Borimak to use domestic flour, which is more expensive and poorer in quality, to produce its pasta, contributing to the company's problems. In 2005, Borimak produced 9,100 tons of pasta; Belarus had to import an additional 97,000 tons of pasta from Russia to satisfy domestic demand.

Information and Technology

¶14. Faster, Better Internet Coming to Belarus

On April 5, Belarus' Communication and IT Minister Vladimir Goncharenko announced that overall data throughput capacity of the external gateway to Belarus has increased from 465 Mbps to 1,554 Mbps as of April 1, 2006. Goncharenko also announced plans to introduce packet switching networks and to integrate telephone, telegraph and data transfer networks into a single network. According to Goncharenko, Ericsson has supplied

Belarus with equipment for multi-service communications networks and for broadband Internet access.

Quote of the Week

[¶15](#). On April 7, Belarusian lawmaker Sergei Kastyan expressed his indifference to the impending EU visa bans on prominent Belarusian politicians:

"So what? They [the EU countries] won't give us visas. We have no money to go there anyway and there is nothing to see there except tiled roofs."

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